

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01

AID-20 DRC-01 NIC-01 /165 W
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P R 041023Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8720

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

CINCPAC

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: ELAB, TH

SUBJ: LABOR UNREST CONTINUES

REF: BANGKOK 18679

1. HIGH POINT OF CURRENT INTENSE WAVE OF STRIKES APPEARS TO HAVE PASSED OVER WEEKEND, PERHAPS IN RESPONSE TO RTG ANNOUNCEMENT NOVEMBER 30 OF ESTABLISHMENT OF LABOR CO-ORDINATION CENTER AND JOINT APPEAL OF LABOR LEADERS DECEMBER 1 OVER NATIONAL RADIO FOR WORKERS TO OBSERVE

TEN-DAY MORATORIUM. VIRTUALLY ALL OF LAST WEEK'S STRIKES HAVE BEEN SETTLED AND THERE WAS NO STRIKE ACTION ON SUNDAY, WHEN MOST FACTORIES AND PLACES OF BUSINESS CLOSED. THERE WERE AT LEAST TEN NEW STRIKES ON

DECEMBER 3, BUT THEY TENDED TO BE IN SMALLER PRIVATE ENTERPRISES AND DID NOT RECEIVE SAME SENSATIONAL FRONT-PAGE PRESS TREATMENT ACCORDED STRIKE NEWS DURING PREVIOUS TWO WEEKS.

2. BANGKOK POST DECEMBER 1 QUOTED LABOR DEPARTMENT DEPUTY DIRECTOR PORN UDOMPONG TO EFFECT THAT THE NEW LABOR CO-ORDINATION CENTER WAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INTENDED TO SOLVE LABOR PROBLEMS, ESPECIALLY STRIKES IN PRIVATE AND

STATE ENTERPRISES. CENTER IS STAFFED BY 60 OFFICIALS ON SEVEN DAY PER WEEK BASIS AND IS DIRECTED BY PORN HIMSELF.

3. UNITED RADIO APPEAL BY REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL 22 WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS LOCAL UNIONS) CALLED ON WORKERS TO OBSERVE TEN DAY MORATORIUM FROM DECEMBER 1 AS GESTURE OF RESPECT TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING (WHOSE BIRTHDAY, DECEMBER 5, IS IMPORTANT THAI HOLIDAY) AND ALSO AS TOKEN OF RESPECT FOR DEAD HEROES OF OCTOBER 14. MORATORIUM INTENDED FURTHER TO DEMONSTRATE WORKERS' SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY DURING CURRENT TURBULENT PERIOD AND TO GIVE EMPLOYERS TIME TO REVIEW THEIR LABOR POLICIES. FINALLY, LEADERS SAID RTG HAD ALREADY INDICATED ITS SYMPATHY TOWARD PLIGHT OF WORKERS BY GRANTING SEVERAL CONCESSIONS TO THEIR DEMANDS.

4. VARIOUS (RATHER BELATED) EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT FOR STRIKING WORKERS HAVE BEEN MADE IN PAST FEW DAYS BY IMPORTANT STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERS, INCLUDING NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND, FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT STUDENTS OF THAILAND, AND THIRAYUTH BOONMEE (FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF NSCT, NOW CO-ORDINATOR OF CENTER OF DEMOCRACY FOR THE PEOPLE). LATTER PROPOSED NATIONAL UNIONS (NOW BANNED BY PRESENT LABOR LAW) BE ESTABLISHED AND THIS SUGGESTION HAS BEEN ECHOED IN SOME EDITORIAL COVERAGE OF CURRENT UNREST. AS VIOLENCE NOT A FEATURE OF WEEKEND STRIKE ACTIVITY, EDITORIALS HAVE GENERALLY RESUMED ALONG LINE OF SUPPORT FOR WORKERS WHILE SEEKING CONSTRUCTIVE SOLUTION TO PRESENT SITUATION.

5. AS CURRENT, UNPRECEDENTED WAVE OF STRIKE ACTION SUBSIDES A FEW AMERICAN FIRMS ARE BEING HIT, INCLUDING SHERATON, SINGER, PEPSI COLA, AND SUCH MILITARY-RELATED FIRMS AS TRANS-ASIA. CHASE MANHATTAN BANK'S BANGKOK HEADQUARTERS IS TARGET DECEMBER 4 BUT MANAGER EXPECTS TO REACH SETTLEMENT DURING NEGOTIATIONS NOW IN PROGRESS.

6. METROPOLITAN ELECTRICAL AUTHORITY GAVE IN TO DEMANDS OF WORKERS' ASSOCIATION BEFORE STRIKE DEADLINE PARA 1 REFTEL. HOWEVER, WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS GENERALLY STILL EMPHASIZING CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE THEY CAN PLAY IN WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS TO PREVENT STRIKES. SMALL PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS WORKERS' ASSOCIATION DECEMBER 3 PETITIONED EDUCATION MINISTRY DEMANDING BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS FOR APPROXIMATELY 200,000

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PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS THROUGHOUT COUNTRY, BUT DID NOT THREATEN STRIKE NOR SET DEADLINE FOR RESPONSE TO DEMANDS.

7. COMMENT ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW LABOR CO-ORDINATION CENTER UNDER DIRECTION OF HIGHLY-RESPECTED, VIGOROUS PORN APPEARS TO BE IMPORTANT STEP IN RTG'S EFFORTS TO END CURRENT STRIKE WAVE AND BE PREPARED FOR FUTURE OUTBREAKS. WORKER ASSOCIATIONS' REPRESENTATIVES JOINT RADIO APPEAL IS SHREWD AND CALCULATED ATTEMPT ON THEIR PART TO

ESTABLISH THEIR BONA FIDES AS LEADERS OF THAI LABOR MOVEMENT. GESTURE TO KING IS ALSO ATTEMPT TO INGRATIATE THEMSELVES WITH MONARCHY WHICH THEY BELIEVE HAS HITHERTO BEEN UNAWARE OF OR UNCARING ABOUT THEIR EXISTENCE. IF MORATORIUM IS FAILURE WORKERS' REPRESENTATIVES STAND TO LOSE MUCH, BUT EMBASSY'S JUDGMENT IS THAT IT WAS CAREFULLY TIMED TO GIVE APPEARANCE OF HAVING ENDED UNPRECEDENTED CURRENT WAVE OF STRIKES (THAT WAS ALREADY ON WANE). IF OCTOBER BELONGED TO THE STUDENTS NOVEMBER WAS THE MONTH WHEN THAI LABOR PROVED THAT IT WILL BE MAJOR FORCE TO RECKON WITH FOR SANYA GOVERNMENT AND ITS SUCCESSORS. STUDENTS' TARDY EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT

TO STRIKERS INDICATE THEIR RECOGNITION OF POTENTIAL POWER THIS NEW PRESSURE GROUP CAN WIELD AND, PARTICULARLY, VALUE OF LABOR AS ALLY TO OPPOSE ANY FUTURE MILITARY TAKEOVER. GIVEN SCALE OF CURRENT STRIKE WAVE IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT A FEW AMERICAN FIRMS WOULD BE AFFECTED DESPITE THEIR GENERALLY FAVORABLE RECORD IN PROVIDING HIGH WAGES AND DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS FOR THEIR THAI EMPLOYEES. REGARDLESS OF NATIONALITY, AND WITH FEW NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS, EMPLOYERS AFFECTED BY CURRENT STRIKE WAVE HAVE BEEN THOSE NOT NOTED FOR GOOD LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS OR EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT GENERALLY. INDEED, RELIABLE SOURCE INFORMED LABOR REPORTING OFFICER DECEMBER 2 THAT NEXT TARGET OF WORKERS WILL BE INEFFICIENT MANAGERS IN STATE ENTERPRISES, WHERE SINECURES AND NEPOTISM HAVE TRADITIONALLY FLOURISHED.

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